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Security Council

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Tuesday, 20 May 2014, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Oh Joon	(Republic of Korea)
Members:	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Barros Melet
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Araud
	Jordan	Mr. Omaish
	Lithuania	Mrs. Kazragienė
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Nigeria	Mr. Laro
	Russian Federation	Mr. Pankin
	Rwanda	Mr. Nduhungirehe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Mrs. DiCarlo

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Fernandez-Taranco.

Mr. Fernandez-Taranco: Since the open debate on 29 April on the situation in the Middle East (see S/PV.7164), political efforts towards a negotiated two-State solution have reached an impasse. It is important that international efforts continue to create the conditions for the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Council members will recall that following the last meeting of the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, the Secretary-General appealed to all concerned parties and the international community alike to use time constructively to find a meaningful path forward, lest continued inaction furthered instability or jeopardized the viability of the two-State solution. He also urged both the Israelis and the Palestinians to exercise prudence and avoid unilateral steps, in an effort to convince each other anew that they are partners for peace. This was also reflected in the recent European Union (EU) Council conclusions of 12 May, which highlighted the EU special privileged partnership on offer and called for both sides to find the political strength to identify common ground for the process to resume.

Meanwhile, discussions continued on the implementation of the intra-Palestinian unity agreement of 23 April between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Hamas. On 5 May, President Abbas and Hamas political leader Meshaal met in Doha to discuss the detailed aspects of that agreement. PLO officials traveled to Gaza on 14 May for the same. The formation of a Palestinian national consensus Government consisting of technocrats remains one of the top priorities of the agreement.

The United Nations continues to support intra-Palestinian reconciliation but notes that it is paramount to reiterate to all factions that the future Government abide by the PLO commitments to recognition of Israel, non-violence and adherence to previous agreements. The EU also reaffirmed its support for the potential national consensus Government in its Council's conclusion so long as it adheres to the principles set out in President Abbas' Cairo speech of 4 May 2011. If these conditions are met, we hope that the international community will assist the Government in developing a positive agenda to tackle difficult political, security, economic and humanitarian challenges, in particular in Gaza.

Following the deposit with the Secretary-General in April of the instruments of accession to a number of international treaties, on 2 and 7 May five of the nine core human rights treaties plus one of the substantive protocols entered into force. The International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Civil and Political Rights will enter into force on 2 July. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights commends the commitment of the State of Palestine to being bound by the international human rights standards contained in these treaties and to engage with the associated human rights treaty bodies that monitor their implementation.

While worrying trends on the ground continued, we take note that the parties avoided a further escalation during this delicate period, in spite of unhelpful rhetoric from various quarters. Israel transferred 463 million shekels in value-added tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority after deducting 120 million shekels for water and electricity payments.

In the West Bank, Israeli security forces carried out a total of 219 search-and-arrest operations. A total of 331 Palestinians were arrested, with two Palestinians killed and 146 injured, including in clashes during demonstrations against the barrier. Eight Israeli security personnel were also injured. Of these, the most significant took place on 15 May, during demonstrations by Palestinians to commemorate the sixty-sixth anniversary of what they call "Al-Nakba Day", which led to clashes with Israeli security forces in the West Bank. Two Palestinian stone throwers, both teenagers, were shot dead, with 23 more injured,

including some by live fire. It is of serious concern that initial information appears to indicate that the two Palestinians killed were both unarmed and appeared to pose no direct threat. The United Nations calls for an independent and transparent investigation by the Israeli authorities into the two deaths, and urges Israel to ensure that its security forces strictly adhere to the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

Settler attacks resulted in four Palestinians injured, including a child and in damage to Palestinian property, including 283 trees. On two separate incidents on 5 and 9 May, respectively, anti-Arab and anti-Christian graffiti were sprayed on the property of Notre Dame Church and the walls of St. George's Church in Jerusalem. Palestinian attacks, mostly consisting of stone and Molotov cocktail throwing, resulted in injuries to two settlers, including a child, and material damage to six vehicles.

Demolitions continued during the reporting period, with 26 structures demolished, including 10 residences, displacing 48 Palestinians, including 30 children. In a separate, worrisome development, on 28 April Israeli authorities issued eviction orders to at least five out of 12 families of Palestinian Bedouins and herder communities living in Sateh Al-Bahr, near Jericho. The Israeli State has yet to respond to the temporary injunction issued by the Israeli court on 4 May. We are also concerned by demolitions in and near the E-1/Maale Adumim area, including on 19 May. Since the beginning of this year, 13 demolition incidents have been reported in that sensitive area, which is higher than the combined total of 11 demolition incidents recorded in the same area over the preceding four years, between 2010 and 2013.

Continued settlement activity, including in occupied East Jerusalem, is illegal under international law and erodes hope for the two-State solution. On 14 May, Israeli authorities began demolishing structures in the illegal settler outpost of Maale Rehavam, near Bethlehem, after failed attempts at a voluntary evacuation.

We remain concerned about the conditions of some 125 Palestinian prisoners, including some 90 administrative detainees, including several members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, in Israeli prisons on continued hunger strike since 24 April to protest the Israeli policy of administrative detention. On 8 May, approximately 5,100 other Palestinian prisoners observed a one-day hunger strike in solidarity with those administrative detainees. It remains the Secretary-General's position that administrative detainees should be tried or released without delay.

In Gaza, the situation was relatively calm compared to recent reporting periods. Nevertheless, Palestinians fired three rockets that landed in Israel. On 2 May, Palestinian militants reportedly shot at an Israeli military patrol near the border fence, which returned fire. None of these incidents resulted in injuries or damage. In separate incidents, Israeli forces reportedly shot and injured six Palestinians near the border fence, including five civilians and one militant, causing injury to four Palestinian fishermen.

At the same time, the persisting dire economic and humanitarian situation resulting from a tightened access regime and violence remains of serious concern. Unemployment rates reached 41 per cent in the first quarter of 2014, 10 percentage points higher than the first quarter of 2013. An alarming 66 per cent of economically active 20-to-24-year-old Gazans were jobless at the beginning of 2014. Gaza remains in urgent need of materials to maintain essential services and to upgrade critical infrastructure, such as water networks and sanitation. We repeat our calls for immediate steps to help improve conditions and ensure a full opening of crossings into Gaza, including Rafah, in order to allow legitimate trade and movements of people.

The current situation further highlights the need to advance a sustainable structural solution to Gaza's energy problems. Gaza's only power plant, facing near shutdowns every couple of months, continues to operate as a result of a second Qatari contribution of another $32 million to procure industrial fuel for the plant. The Qatari contribution is expected to enable the Gaza power plant to continue generating until mid-June. Meanwhile, the emergency stop-gap donation by the Turkish Government to replenish on-site reserves for critical health and water facilities has been implemented. Another such donation by the Islamic Development Bank is scheduled to expire in June. We appeal to donors to step in and sustain this interim safety net to redress Gaza's electricity needs, which are bound to increase with the summer months approaching.

In the meantime, we welcome the resumption of some 10 United Nations construction projects,

worth around $14 million, as well as the approval of an housing project of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in Rafah, valued at around $17 million. A remaining six pre-approved projects worth $12 million remain stalled. In addition, an estimated $105 million-worth of construction works have yet to be approved by the Government of Israel. In short, much more is required to address Gaza's humanitarian and development needs and alleviate the deteriorating conditions of the civilian population, including a more predictable Israeli Government approval process.

In a separate development, on 7 May two Palestinians, one of them a civilian, were executed in Gaza. Both were reportedly convicted based on the claim that they were collaborating with Israel. The executions were carried out without the approval of President Abbas, as required by Palestinian law. We have serious concerns with regard to the lack of due process, the use of military courts to try civilians, the lack of compliance with rigorous fair trial standards in Gaza and allegations of ill-treatment and torture during interrogations of persons later sentenced to death. The United Nations urges the de facto authorities in Gaza to impose an immediate moratorium on executions.

Council members were briefed on 6 May on developments in Lebanon. I would note that the two-month presidential election period there started on 25 March. Four parliamentary sessions have been scheduled so far by Speaker Berri for the purposes of the election. In the first session, none of the declared candidates gained the required number of votes. In the subsequent sessions, the most recent on 15 May, there was no quorum, and therefore no vote took place. The term of President Sleiman, whose leadership in difficult times the Council has recognized, expires on 25 May. Council members have in the past underscored the importance of successful elections in Lebanon for the continuity of State institutions.

On 11 May, in a statement on behalf of the International Support Group for Lebanon, the United Nations Special Coordinator emphasized that the process should be entirely Lebanese-owned and free of foreign interference, but equally stressed the keen interest of the international community in its successful completion on time in accordance with constitutional practice. I take this opportunity to reiterate that call. We hope that members of Parliament will engage fully in the coming days to elect a President by the date set by law. It is important for confidence and stability in Lebanon that a vacancy in the presidency be avoided.

The security plan approved by the Government of Prime Minister Tammam Salam has continued to contribute to an improved security situation in Tripoli and in the Bekaa Valley, although there have continued to be incidents connected with the conflict in Syria close to the border, particularly in the area of Arsal.

In addition, there have been violent incidents in the Palestinian refugee camps. On 7 April, clashes in Mieh Mieh led to eight fatalities. On 9 and 21 April, there were incidents in which two persons were killed by gunmen in Ain Hilweh. On 12 May, further clashes between armed groups occurred in the same camp.

The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) along the Blue Line remained relatively calm. Close cooperation by the parties with UNIFIL during such fragile times and the continued efforts in that regard are critical to safeguarding the calm along the Blue Line. Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued on an almost daily basis.

The Council was extensively briefed on Syria last week by Joint Special Representative Brahimi, so I will not repeat his clear messages. However, in the Golan, ongoing clashes in the central and southern parts of the area of separation underline the volatility of the situation. On 8 May, heavy fighting between the Syrian armed forces and the armed members of the opposition occurred east of Quneitra, in relative proximity to the crossing gates between the Alpha and Bravo sides, further threatening the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. In the context of those clashes, tank rounds and an artillery shell landed across the ceasefire line. There was no response from the Alpha side. Such developments have the potential to escalate the situation between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic and to jeopardize the ceasefire between the two countries.

In conclusion, last month, Mr. Serry reminded the Security Council that, without a credible political horizon, we risk putting the Oslo paradigm in real jeopardy (see S/PV.7164). Yet we cannot rush the parties back to the table without the proper parameters in place. The current pause in the talks allows for both parties to consider their next steps, building on the intensive engagement by the United States over the past nine months. The Secretary-General remains committed

to working with the parties and international partners for an end of the occupation that began in 1967 and the establishment of a Palestinian State, living side by side in peace with Israel within secure and recognized borders, and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. It is the responsibility of the two sides not to take unilateral steps, which will further complicate efforts to return to negotiations.

The President: I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.